



HerStory

Celebrating Women Who Tell Our Stories
A WCC Anthology Edited by Tom Zimmerman



Acknowledgments

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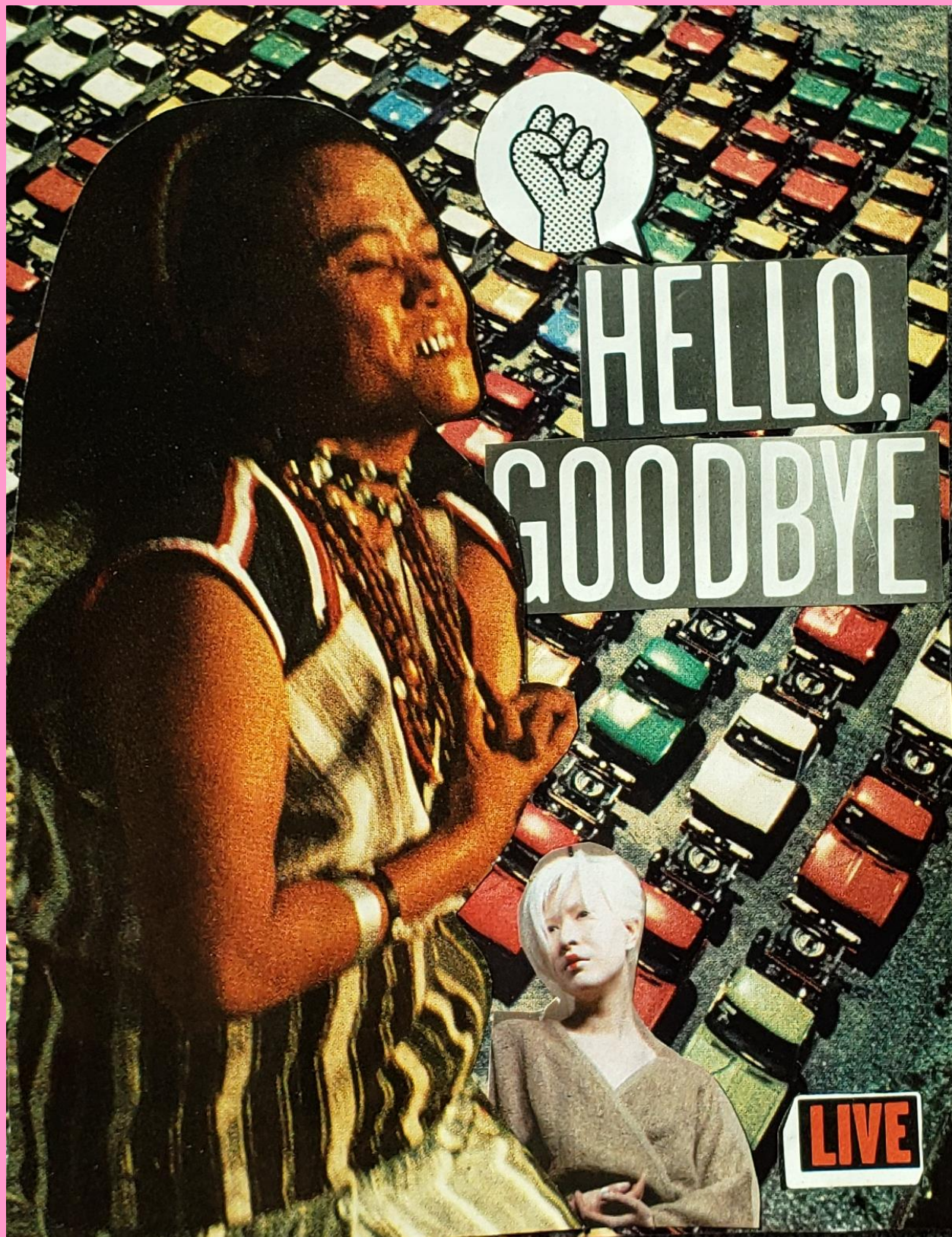
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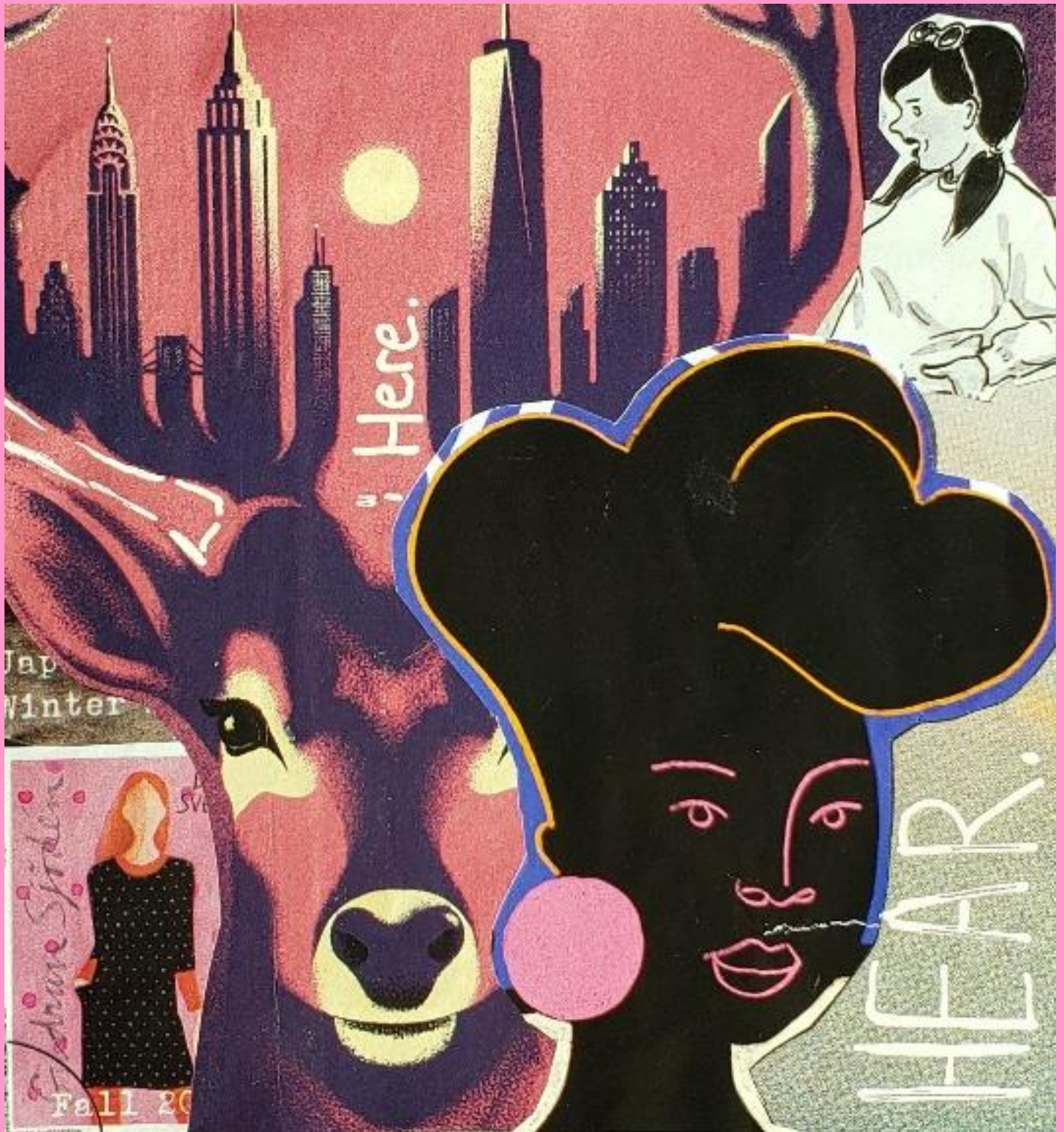
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Maryam Barrie

Application to the Oracle

The new app on my phone, *Sky View Lite*,
shows Saturn and Jupiter whirling together in Sagittarius.

I aim my phone at the floor of my room and there they are,
swirling beneath my feet. Below the forest, the water table,

the mineral core, below the cold Antarctic waters
southwest of Australia, where google locates the antipode,

the exact other side of the world from where I live almost
six hundred miles away from my eldest daughter.

The app portrays Sagittarius as a not very smart looking centaur –
the wounded archer, Chiron. He never heard of Achilles.

The perimeter of his horse half is bounded by stars. If I center
each star on my phone, I learn its name. I highlight the star

at the end of his archer's bow, the arrow tip, to find its name –
Nash. Formerly al Nasl. In China, that star is known

as First Star of the Winnowing Basket. I went to a larger
screen to learn that, my app can only do so much. It lives

alongside the almost seventy apps for astrology, books,
French fortune-telling cards, birdcalls. I pull a card from

the *Holy Light Tarot* app, get the Hierophant. The teacher.
My daughter's tenure-track position in northern Wisconsin,

so far away. The *Seek* app identifies wildflowers, mushrooms, butterflies. Walking with my daughter at a nature preserve

near her home, nine hours away from where I am now, we used my phone to identify an *Atlantis fritillary*. We held

hands as small bright orange wings flitted from Flat-topped Goldenrod to Rattlesnake Master. I talk with her twice a week,

hold her voice to my ear. The family horoscopes are loaded into the *AstroFuture* app. Her Cancer moon opposes Neptune, trines Pluto.

That is me, in her. My moon Saturn conjunction in Sagittarius, my parents in me. O Oracle, here is my question –

Tell me who I am, how I am. How is she?

Maryam Barrie

Magic and Science

My adorable grandson with his shining
eyes and fierce attention began in biology.

The dense busyness of his being – multiplying
and dividing – found shelter in the harbor

of my daughter, who grew in the home I am.
He began too in my daughter's childhood courage,

the brilliant sweetness of my son-in-law's curiosity.
There is an explanation for some of the magic –

and it is all magic. The chemistry of attraction
fires my synapses, waters my unending thirst,

airs out my dirty laundry, earths my impulses,
dances within the hundred and eighteen elements.

In my personal geology, all the variants of change:
sedimentary, igneous, and metamorphic illustrate

how I resist and succumb to mysterious processes.
Physics tells me observing things makes them change –

we can't measure particles without them knowing,
which means they must have some sense of who they are

and when someone is watching. Someone is always watching.
Someone always leaves the stage and another enters.

Our stories frame how we forge our lives, exercise our hearts.
We bloom when we fight to be ourselves. Demand ruthless

honesty, tell the truth about who we are and what we did.
Actions and events leave archaeological, emotional records.

Take the way the waxing gibbous moon shines in my bedroom
window, makes shadows visible, forms concrete.

Starlight once filled the forest, an astronomy of circling sky
dimmed now even far from the great cities and their electric glow.

Language organizes what we think we know
as words trace lineages, reveal motives.

Words have magic too, a memory of what they meant
in each particular tongue, in each particular mouth.

Kafka said the meaning of life is that it stops.
It begins too.

Maryam Barrie

Homemade Religion

My father told me he took me into moonlight
to name me, implied this was a Muslim practice.

He said nothing about slaughtering sheep.
For him, girls might not be worth sheep.

I stopped having to go to my grandmother's Methodist
church when young because I kept fainting in the pews.

When I think of Christianity now, I remember
the line from *Slaughter House Five*: "Why are Christians

so cruel?" My grandfather was a mason so my grand-
mother belonged to the Order of the Eastern Star.

Their emblem is an upside-down five-pointed star.
Everyone knows a pentagram has to be pointing up

to do a body any good. Grandma would dress
up in chiffon gowns for their ceremonies.

The ceremonies happened before euchre.
I'd pull hard on the strings of her corset so I could zip

up her gown. She'd align her fox stole above
her collarbones. The fox's eyes were glass.

Years later, in that same house, my daughter
had some serious fox fear. She thought foxes wanted

to break in through the back door, the linen cupboard.
Her fear was a kind of echo.

A flowered Hamza from Israel hangs in our dining room
below the heads of Neptune and the Lady of the Lake.

Figures of Ganesha and the Virgin of Guadalupe adorn
the altar in my bedroom. Milagro hearts festoon our house.

The statuary Buddha in my garden faces St. Francis.
Everybody is welcome.

Lea Benton

Silenced Else

A Blitz Poem

To all the mothers who are quiet
To all the mothers who are silenced

Silenced from the birth of their children
Silenced from the birth of themselves

Themselves who have never had the opportunities of men
Themselves who live in the shadows of their fathers

Fathers who take what is theirs
Fathers who take what is hers

Hers are her own
Hers are without owners

Owners of what love should be
Owners of what sacrifice can show

Show up when he cannot
Show up when her children are lost

Lost is what she remembers
Lost in herself until she finds it

It being the passion that brings her to her feet
It is what makes her stronger in this life

Life might bring pain
Life might bring suffering

Suffering in a world that wasn't her own
Suffering that is only gone when she closes her eyes

Eyes that are blue
Eyes that are brown

Brown or green so we can see
Brown with green like the Earth she resides

Resides in that house down the street
Resides in the hovel where she thrives

Thrives once the foothold is made
Thrives once safety is found

Found either later in life
Found possibly sooner

Sooner than she could expect
Sooner than what he would like

Like the flower in the Spring
Like the calm before the storm

Storm is what she will make
Storm that will shake the foundations

Foundations of the world humans have made
Foundations of the structure built around us

Us are who are responsible
Us who are remarkable

Remarkable as the way our mothers paved the way
Remarkable as young women wish to be

Be the one who is strong for yourself
Be the one who could be strong for someone else

Else we be stuck in a pattern inside and boxed
Else our daughters will be silenced like our mothers were

Were
Boxed

Mae Bumpus



Alyssa Davis

Have you ever shuddered as you wondered... How many murderers you passed on the road? How many dead bodies cry for you to help them in pickup trucks and suvs? Their cries sound so sweet, so full of sorrow... Yet we can not hear them as they passed us as they flow along in the whispers of the wind.

Have you ever cried in the hospital as you realize a mother has given birth at that very moment? But so in that very moment a family has lost a grandparent too. At the same time that baby cries its first breath and that lost soul cries its goodbyes. We cannot hear them. As they are lost in the whispers of the wind of a thousand other lost souls and newborns.

Have you ever smiled at a story so full of life and good times? Full of fantasy and love and adventure? But then had to weep as you learned that the author has long gone? Their story has been given to the whispers of the wind, forever missed.

Have you ever listened to a sad song? Cried along with it? Realized that your life is full of as much sorrow as it? Decided to become that sad song? Given up? Have you ever given yourself over? Become one with the whispers of the wind?

Kaitlyn Deming

Home

She draws her lines of separation like she's always tried to do. The lines don't stick in her mind though like they never do, no one can see them but her. She pushes them away only for a moment, like a magnet they always come back. She's always wanted to be herself, her own self and not them or like them. They never outright told her that she couldn't or wouldn't be, she hears in visceral color, and she remembers what she shouldn't have to have heard, but it doesn't matter what they said or didn't, it only matters what they did and do. The price of what they took and didn't let her have makes it worth more to her than anything. It's not quite as simple as riding it out like she thought long ago. She had to fight to save her agency, her personality, herself, and they know not what they've done. For more than half a lifetime she's waited for the day she could be herself for real, she thought she had it and didn't more times than she could keep count. She was always terrified of being her true self and showing the world the same, constantly looking behind her figurative back to make sure they weren't judging her or thinking about doing so. To her, personal expression isn't just a fun thing to do, personal expression and herself are one in the same. She created systems in her head to combat this constant threat, this ever-persistent looming fear of having even more of her fleeting agency taken from her. From the first days she could remember to where she is now, life's been a constant fight. She always knew that if she were to let them in too far, they'd take everything she had. What she was afraid of in a not so figurative sense was worse and more real to her than physical death. Had they broken into her mind, toppled her defenses, taken what they wanted, she'd have no agency left to fight, and there wouldn't be anything left to fight for. To her, death would come for her in this form. She hates herself for keeping a cold hard exterior for so long, a defense mechanism, a facade as it was. Everyone had to think what she thought they had to think to keep her real self, safe. Had something made its way back around to them, some bit of expression, some bit of realness, she knew it'd be game over. She was half right, and they were double wrong.

She has an inexplicable desire to go home, but home's not a place, it's an idea, a state of mind. In her dissociated daydreams of home, she has, and always has been, herself. No one's there in the fog of her daydreams to tell her anything about it. At home, she's finally free.

Beach Memories

Little girl's feet
Leave distinct prints
Disturbing the
Smooth wet sand.
No matter.
Ocean tides will soon
Erase her presence
But not her delight
In this place.

Little girl sees tiny crabs
Emerge from her imprints
Search out food in the
Newly exposed sand
Before water rushes in,
Flows out, takes prints
And crabs with it.

Little girl marvels as shells
With their living tenants
Move with the tides,
Passing other floating,
Wandering denizens
Of the beach.

Little here is permanent
Except impermanence.
Even the beach wanders,
Grows and recedes,
Morphs into a sliding undertow
Redeposited somewhere else.

Little girl watches in wonder;
The beach changes each day.
New prints, new sandcastles,
Soon wash away.
Throwing out her arms, she
Runs along the beach,
Feels, absorbs the immense
Power and freedom of the
Ever-changing, rolling sea.

Esta Grossman

House Becomes a Home

Come in all sizes, come in all shapes
Some made of stucco, some cedar shakes
Some made of mud, some made of tin
Any material to house people in.

Many rooms or two or four
Shiny hardwood or plain wooden floor
Plush soft rugs or bare concrete
All work as surfaces for our feet.
Stand or sit or walk around
Some have nothing but hard ground.

Fancy appliances or old coal stove
Two-basin sink or pump near the road
Soft downy mattress or straw on the floor
Cold, bare pallet or pillows galore.
Some people obsess about brass towel racks
While others find mud to fill in the cracks
Strong windows and doors keep out snow and rain
Countless others have nary a pane.

Whether the shelter be fancy or plain
No matter what some others may claim
If the people are generous, caring and kind
Any house is a home when love lives inside.

Esta Grossman

Old Picture

The picture at the bottom of
my mother's underwear drawer,
left behind; she is dead.
Why hidden beneath the underwear?
Waiting to be found?
It looks worse for wear,
fold-riddled
black and white dated 1920
faint ink on a yellowed back.

My mom 10, one sister 7, another 2,
my grandma and grandpa,
ramrod straight behind
their offspring,
stare into the camera.
No babushka adorns
my grandma's head
despite the custom of
orthodox Jews.
My grandpa wears no yarmulka.
My mom is already
chunky and overweight,
lifelong struggle with her body,
her sisters cute and thin.

What occasion? Where taken?
Do they speak to the
photographer in Yiddish?
No one smiles.
What is the Yiddish word

for “cheese?”

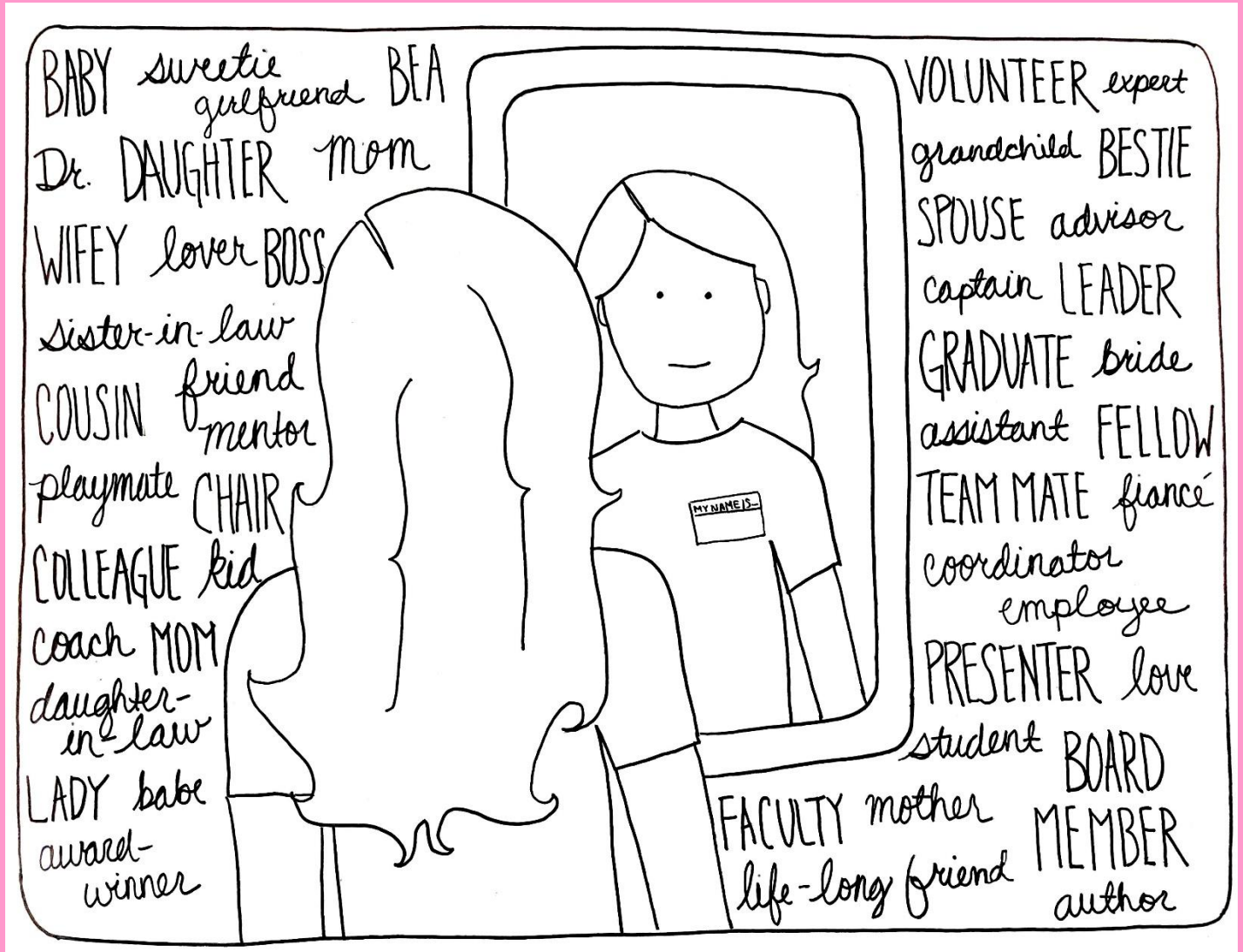
I can weave several tales,
but will never know.

They are all dead now.

I am left with the hidden,
silent photograph
from the bottom of the
underwear drawer.

Jessica Hale

My Name Is . . .



Warhol's 12-Panel Marilyn

I am trying to find myself; sometimes that's not easy.

—Marilyn Monroe

It's a mean trick, his dangling
eleven neon makeovers in front of me
like distorted mirrors to choose from—
red face with white hair
or blue with indigo edges, a film noir
version. Eleven ways to shift
the indelible pinup girl
consumers carry in their minds
when they hear that name,
not really my name: *Marilyn*.

Even museum-goers,
primed to see anew,
miss the other eleven because
the blonde, tousled,
beauty-marked, eye-shadowed me
in the upper left corner
draws their eyes
like the legend on a map
or the GO square on a *Monopoly* board.
Start here! My cage, their comfort zone.

The same shallow take still on display,
racking up millions
for Andy's estate.
Eleven of these girls don't belong here;
one of these girls is always the same.

Diamond Johnson

Life

Life is precious when you are here
But what about when you are gone?
Now that you've gotten older do you think about going?
Be strong, and hold on
God got you when you're gone ...right?
At last I drop to my knees and pray "god is today the day?"
As silence fills the room I cannot move, am I awake?
Life is no mistake am I doing something wrong?
Listen to the walls and listen to the rainfalls
Life is precious when you are here
Until next time you're coming home

Bridget Kelly

you are your sun, the center of your universe

You are a sheaf of golden light wrapped in the silk of woman. They made your soul in an elsewhere place, where beauty itself becomes matter.

When you love it's a conflagration – uncontrollable and desperate. You have a fear: they will put out your fire, or better, pilch it for themselves. In a blur of chaos, they leave only the parts even you hate.

Your head is too strong, your heart too weak and you do not hide it well.

He has discovered your blanket of bliss – its job to warm your vulnerability. Your innocence is prey in his eyes. But you are just as hungry in your sadness as he is in curiosity.

The day your heart breaks – it is war. The shimmering thing inside you dies, your soul bursts into silent stardust. Thundering clouds overcast you. They warned you: men know what you're hiding and they don't like it. The brilliant flame inside you swallows you whole. Burning in your ears when he explains he cannot love you like you need.

What a shame, did no one tell you not to make homes out of other people's hearts? Truest love beats only in your own chest.

Huda Khan

Stepping on the scale
A knot forms in her stomach
No dinner tonight

Diane M. Laboda

Because

I can't come to the phone right now
because in a perfectly blue sky I just noticed
a cloud go by in the shape of a swan.
I'm waiting for the one that looks
like Mickey Mouse.

I can't come to the phone
because there was a noise upstairs like
something fell on the floor from a high shelf
and I'm going to spend the next hour (maybe two)
looking for it.

I can't come to the phone
because I can't find what fell, but I started
to clean out the closet piled with boxes
and found the photos of our wedding,
and my ukulele.

I can't come to the phone
because I'm looking for my music books
and am fascinated by the chords I remember
and the tunes that go through my head
that I used to know the words to.

I can't come to the phone
because the picture of him makes me weepy.
And I want to look at them all and cry myself
into a long nap on the futon that never gets
used except when company comes.

I can't come to the phone
because I now need a cup of coffee
and a candy bar to make me right again,
even though I will never be
right again.

I can't come to the phone
because I'm out of coffee and candy bars.
And people are dying in collapsed buildings in Syria
and I need to pray for them. And I have to take
a Zoom call from Helen who's in South Africa (OMG).

So I can't come to the phone
because I'm in the middle of making turkey soup,
Matt's favorite. But, I have to use chicken broth,
and I ran out of carrots, and the onions have all sprouted.
Yet so many in Turkey have not eaten in weeks.

I can't come to the phone
because I just can't move from this chair.
My hip hurts. My head's foggy.
I can't reach the phone. And life's so unfair
and cuddling with my dog makes me calmer.

I can't come to the phone
because it's dark and the shadows have
enveloped me. They know how to hold me gently
and yet suck all the air out of me, but at least
my house still stands, unshaken.

I can't come to the phone right now
because it's night and I must sleep. Only in sleep
do I feel safe and content that I've survived
another day without him. I'm still relatively sane.
And I think I might be happy tomorrow.

Diane M. Laboda

Life in Moments

We live our lives in moments perceived,
each and every one, through senses
with an instantaneous shutter speed,
a welcoming and curious heart, and put
in a memory file that shortens the older we get.

Each moment lived in an instant
can be caught in a photo or a video,
or a sound byte, or a flicker
of candlelight blown out
and done with.

Each moment floats in a memory file,
accessible through the mists of time,
submerged by others we've chosen
to notice and string together in our story
like pearls.

We ask each moment to stand still
so we can capture a photo, paint a picture,
compose a song, stay a little longer.
A freeze-frame captures forever
before it fades or mixes or skews.

We ask each moment to pause for
consideration, so we can capture its
essence fully, appreciate its wisdom
a little longer before it escapes
our notice.

We live our lives in each moment,
and its doppelganger photograph some time
later when we hope to relive it,
however insufficiently,
and realize only then, we had to be there.



Sally Silvennoinen

Archaeology of My Mom's Stuff

Today was the day to clean out the attic of my mom's old farm house. We unlatch the old panel door to start the ascent up the stairs.... known as groin pulls to the uninitiated. After the ninth step you maneuver along the wide plank boards placed across the rafters and through the cobwebs.

There are no treasures buried in the attic. This was a working farm and the attic was a repository of accumulations to live a self sufficient life. A museum of farm life. Stuff. Generations of people whose memories are put into boxes. Each box another layer of stuff pushed further back. Crawling across the plank boards was like crawling along a time line of people you should know. An accumulation and documentation of a life of a person who lived. A story of what they wore, what they read and what they wrote. Boxes of letters.

This attic was mom's treasure trove of memories. Stories of her mother and father and their parents. Stuff. Mom and I went through boxes of textbooks, big band era records, wool coats, worn shoes, galoshes and clothes. Mom held up a dress and said, "I remember wearing this dress to a dance with your dad before we were married. Your dad would sell his blood to pay for our tickets." She paused then continued, "He was a good dancer." Mom kept telling stories about parts of her life that mattered to her, before I was born. All I could see was a stained, tattered, beige dress, shredded by mice. Mom continued, "I was just a farm girl, living at home with my parents. Then I met your dad... I took the dress from her and said, 'burn pile!' and tossed it in the growing pile of stuff." Mom held up another piece of clothing. "Oh, this was my father's wool bathing suit." She was sharing her memories with me and I was feigning interest. "He wore this swimming in the river. We only had a bath once a week. It was a lot of work to draw water and heat the water on the wood stove." She continued sharing her stories as I took the chewed bathing suit and tossed it in the growing pile of clothes to be burned. It was hot and dusty in the attic. It was a long day sorting, piling and moving stuff. I

carried boxes out of the attic, down the stairs and out the door.

There were still boxes lining the attic wall. Canning jars, lamps that needed rewiring, wooden berry boxes, chairs that needed repair, clothes hampers, an old baby crib and a wicker buggy top. There were old pots and pans. "I remember Mom used this pan for special holiday dishes," Mom was saying. I was tired of listening. She was touching everything, personalizing it with a name, place and time. She was wrapping herself with memories down the timeline in her mind. Evening was settling in and it had been a long day. Their car and trailer was loaded with things we never found time to talk about. I stood in the driveway and waved as my parents drove away out the drive.

Exhausted I lit the bonfire and sat down on a broken wooden chair. I was burning memories. They swirled and twisted up in the fire. A flame caught a corner of a memory and glistened in the night like stars twinkling in the sky. The evening wore on and the fire burned low. Sparks blended with fireflies and the night drew to a close. Each object of affection turned from glowing embers to white ash.

Sally Silvennoinen

Through My Kitchen Window in Time

I stand at my Altar of Found Objects. The window sill above the kitchen sink. I look out the window and gaze, where the strong women in my life have stood for generations. My altar is lined with pudding stones. The white quartz conglomerates imbedded with pebbles of jasper. There are Gowganda Tillites, another conglomerate of pink granite pebbles, imbedded into hardened grey mud. I find these stones when I walk the back fields where the farmers in my life have toiled. Along the altar of found objects are broken pieces of pottery, china and crock ware. Accompanied by shards of old glass, nuts and feathers.

I wonder what women thought as they were aging in place, gazing out through this window of time. I stand at the kitchen sink gazing out the window, turn on the faucet waiting for the water to warm. I rinse my morning cup of coffee. The birds are singing and the squirrels are scurrying back and forth. No one is playing in the yard but the yard is not empty.

Where have all the years gone? It seems like yesterday I was so busy cleaning the kitchen table and putting things away. I would look out the window and watch the children play. The dog was lying on the porch in the shade and the chickens scratch the ground. Now things stay in place. I forgot to notice and time went by.

My mother gazed through this window and saw her 4-H sheep grazing the clover and grass around the house. My mom could see the other farm animals out the window by the barn which has since burnt down.

My mother's mother brought the plumbing indoors. I feel her presence standing here gazing out the window. The kitchen counter was built for her short stature. I know she watched her chickens scratching. She sold their eggs and they were her egg money.

My great grandmother would have had to step outside to see her 5 children in the yard. Maybe she walked down to the barn and looked for them up in the hay loft. On the way back to the house, I imagine, she would carry a bucket of water from the windmill back to the house to heat on the wood stove. I picture her with her hands on her hips, looking for kids hiding in the corn rows or playing in the wheat fields. Maybe riding around on the old plow horse.

Before my great grandmother lived in this house along the Huron River, two pioneer sisters lived in this house. The first sister died in child birth and the second sister lived to an old age.

Before these two women, I imagine a native woman standing outside the wooden structure looking in. Curious. Wondering what the future holds as she ages in place.

The Burden of Beauty

The influences of modern day culture upon the flesh is a heavy burden to carry. The expectation to look a certain way, act a certain way, be a certain way, and if you are not, you are considered unideal. The perception of what is “perfect” has been corrupted to reflect archaic ideals that should no longer apply.

The extra weight carried upon the hips. The double chin, far from chiseled perfection. The split ends at the end of a strand of hair, damaged, worn down. Stretch marks laced upon the stomach, representing transformations the body has experienced as weight is gained and weight is lost, a neverending cycle. Scars representing the journey lived and wounds healed with time, yet, never forgotten.

Any and all flaws marking the human body, if they corrupt the idea of what a woman should look like to fit an unrealistic and unattainable standard, are looked upon with disdain, contempt, resentment. For the flaws prevent a woman’s body from fitting the impossible beauty standard set decades ago.

Only if a woman is thin enough. Only if a woman is perfectly groomed. Only if a woman is blemish free with healthy, full hair. If a woman is that of a porcelain doll, are they considered worthy. Worthy of love. Worthy of common human decency. Worthy of acceptance. Worthy of respect.

Yet, this ideal cannot be obtained and does not reflect what it means to be a true, real woman. A real woman recognizes her flaws and grows to accept them. Her flaws empower her. Her flaws motivate her to be a better person. Her flaws become her strength for they make her genuine and authentic; they bring out her true essence. They make her real.

Society’s version of femininity is damaging for it yearns to make each individual woman fit into a box, with identical qualities of what makes a woman acceptable, taking away her own beauty as it’s no longer her own. True beauty doesn’t lay in

the eyes of the beholder. It doesn't lay in the eyes of societal expectations. It radiates from the inside out. It shines from the heart. The soul. Beaming out like sunrays. Beautiful.

Sarah Smith

Haiku(s): Progress Not Perfection

Women were told to
stand quietly, to blend in
to the background. They

were told to behave,
to be proper, and to be
polite. They were told

never to complain
or ask questions. To hide their
intellect so as

not to threaten or
intimidate others. They
were encouraged to

make others feel safe,
comfortable, by hiding their
true essence and core

identity. Now,
women are empowered to
be their truest, most

authentic self, no
matter who is offended
or taken aback.

Women can speak their truth freely, celebrating their voice, their strengths. There

is still much progress to develop. Hope is not lost as history

has been made and is in the making. Such as the human condition.

Willow Symonds

Truth Coming Out of Her Well

The truth was naked, gurgling at birth
She long ago smeared her trophies in blood
Old gold never gleamed much to begin with
But men can't build kingdoms without old gold,
without stolen pennies or careful lies,
without false visions of her dark magic
Now she crawls from the pit they'd dug for her,
clawing the yellow wallpaper from stone
No longer rotting at the well's bottom,
no longer buried by wishful pennies
or careless lies or her forgotten names,
she wraps their last words like thread through her skin,
out to shame mankind, sharpened whip in hand,
while her rage boils from dormant love

Yolanda E. Walker

Black Her-story Month

What happened to the African woman in America is not well known. Her story does not appear in the school curriculum. Black History Month does not mention her suffering. The African diaspora is oblivious to her plight. Researching historical and personal accounts evokes strong emotions. How could anyone survive such inhumane treatment?

Kidnapped and marched miles to the coast. Thrown into the dungeon. Walls plastered with bible verses. This place is known as “the point of no return.” Millions would never see Mother Africa again. The captives were loaded onto ships built to carry human cargo across the Atlantic like livestock. The journey took 75 days. Women would have periods and relieve themselves where they lay. The traumatic event of captivity caused pregnant women to miscarry. Violence and sexual assault from the crew were common. If you were fortunate to survive the middle passage—more horror awaited.

Upon arrival in America, a veterinarian inspects your body. If healthy, you are placed in a sulfur bath and greased down with lard in preparation for the auction block. Like trash, those that are sick are thrown away. Your culture and spirituality are stripped from you. Once sold, you go to a foreign place and are brutalized into submission. Nonconformity will cause beatings, torture, and being repeatedly raped and violated.

You are expected to mate with a male slave and have as many babies as possible. There is no intimacy or romance for the enslaved African woman—only sorrow and pain.

The plight of the African male is no better. If he gets out of line, he is stripped naked, placed over a log, and sexually assaulted by his owner or another slave. The process is known as “buck breaking.” The enslaved African woman and her

children witness the assault. This is to humiliate and deter other slaves from getting out of line. The psychological terror does not end there. Her children are sold off. She is never to see them again.

The end of slavery did not stop the violation of African women in America. Post-reconstruction continued the nightmare. Testimony of Black women who suffered violation and humiliation by mobs of white men occurred throughout the country. Fast forward to today, and not much has changed. Her-story swept under the rug and ignored. It waits for a voice and to be heard.

Tom Zimmerman



Tom Zimmerman



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From Memory

for MJZ (1939-2009)

Dad wouldn't let her work outside the home.
She taught me how to cook, arrange food on
a plate, enunciate, say "Thank you," comb
my hair. An Elvis fan, she'd dance till dawn,
but only if she thought it proper. Smoked
two packs a day but didn't drink until
her forties. Spent her last years vodka-soaked.
MS deep-fried her mind but not her will.
A Charlestown kid, she hated the Midwest
and kept her accent pure. She drew. She joked
Dad liked her best in red. But she preferred
light blue. These details of her life I wrest
from memory: a story blurred, and yoked
to guilt. But also love. Yes, that's the word.

